

# Historic Aviation Memorial Museum



## PROP WASH JANUARY 2020

### Museum

903-526-1945

### Hangar

903-592-1202

### Fax:

903-526-0946

### E-mail:

hamm2008@att.net

### Web Site:

[www.tylerhamm.org](http://www.tylerhamm.org)

### Mailing Address:

150 Airport Dr. Box 2-7

Tyler, TX 75704

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### Museum Staff

Chip Williams—Curator

Karon Gilmore —Finance

Mgr.

## CHRISTMAS DINNER

As reported in the December PROP WASH HAMM'S Christmas dinner at Hollytree Country Club was enjoyed with camaraderie and a good meal. Below are a few of the photographs taken during the evening event. The bottom left photo is HAMM's annual Award for Outstanding Performance in support of HAMM's Mission being presented to Jerry Murdoff.



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

This will be my last Prop Wash as President of the Board of Directors for HAMM, I would like to take this opportunity to honor three of our members who have Gone West this past year. These members contributed tremendously over the years and we will miss them.

The first person being honored is Wilbur Dixon. I have taken the opportunity of posting a more detailed summary of his life and challenges than I have for our other two members.

### **Wilbur Amiel Dixon**



On Monday, August 26, 2019, Wilbur A. Dixon "slipped the surly bonds of Earth, put out his hand, and touched the face of God".

Wilbur attended the Tuskegee Institute, was a member of the Army Air Corps, Air Force, and Army. He served his country during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. During his military service, he was awarded multiple Bronze Stars, multiple Good Conduct Medals, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnamese Unit Citation, Army Commendation Medal, multiple Overseas Bars, Aircraft Crewman's Badge, Air Force Longevity Service Award, and an Air Medal.

Following his military service, Wilbur remained an avid pilot. He was an active member of Civil Air Patrol in New Mexico and Texas, maintained his credentials as a flight instructor, and served with the Historic Aviation Memorial Museum in Tyler, TX.

Wilbur is survived by his wife of 60 years, Pauline of New Mexico; daughters, Renee Mitchell of Georgia, Kim Dixon of New Mexico, Valerie Valentine of Texas, Eileen Schatzman of Maryland, and Victoria Davis of Colorado; 19 grandchildren; 13 great grandchildren, and more on the way.

#### **His life summary: By JACQUE HILBURN, Feature Writer, Tyler Paper**

Wilbur Dixon was one of the "forgotten" Eagles of WWII's Tuskegee airmen and the only known member of this special group of flyers in Tyler. Tuskegee refers to the aviation courses offered at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Black airmen made extraordinary contribution to the war efforts, but racial inequalities excluded them from attending traditional training programs.

Wilbur Dixon of Tyler spent much of his childhood listening to stories about his grandfather's wild and rugged days as a Buffalo Solider chasing Pancho Villa and fighting alongside Teddy Roosevelt.

He dreamed of one day having his own career in the military, as a pilot. Dixon would eventually follow in his grandfather's footsteps, becoming one of the elite Tuskegee airmen, occasionally referred to as "Lonely Eagles."

He retired in 1972 after 26 years of active duty that began with service at the end of World War II and continued through two tours in Vietnam. For his efforts, he received an Air Medal and a Bronze Star for service and time spent in combat. At 80, Dixon continued to serve as a colonel in the Civil Air Patrol.

He is modest, humble, reserved and deeply loyal to the country and the idea of service. "Kids nowadays don't sacrifice anymore," he said. "One of the reasons we have the Civil Air Patrol program is to take the kids, give them discipline, a sense of responsibility and leadership. It gives them a taste of what it could be if everyone would cooperate."

## OFF TO WAR

Dixon spent spare moments of his boyhood building model airplanes.

"Aviation has always been my interest," he said. "I wanted to get into naval aviation, but it was impossible at that time. The only place I could go when I graduated from high school, to even get close, was Tuskegee. That was the military academy for Coloreds."

## Courtesy Photo



*"Aviation has always been my interest. I wanted to get into naval aviation, but it was impossible at that time."*

Tuskegee was one of two Black substitutes for military academies; the other was Hampton in Virginia. At 16, he signed up.

"I got into aviation maintenance," he said. "Sixteen is too young for active duty." The atmosphere at Tuskegee was similar in nature to the military. They marched to chapel and prepped for inspections. Dixon said he continually applied for training in aviation, but it took years to finally achieve his goal.

"The flying program closed late in 1945," he said. "I was scheduled to go in during '45 so they sent me to the infantry instead." He attended combat engineering school and studied to become a demolitions expert. "Basically we built bridges and then blew them up," he said with a grin. "I had a lot of OJT, on-the- job- training."

The career military man said he never seriously considered the possibility he could perish in combat, recalling with ease a "little" explosion accident in the Marianas in Guam shortly after

the war had ended. "The Japanese, at night, didn't accept the fact that when the war ended, it ended," he said. "They had artillery in underground bunkers and they would bring it out at night and fire at the ships."

A plan was concocted to locate the bunkers and detonate the contents, but there were only two men available to complete the mission, and the other was too far away to be of any use, Dixon said. "I was small," he said. "They sent me."

He sneaked into the bunker and set the ignitions, only to realize he couldn't exit out the same route without disturbing the wiring so he chose another route.

As Dixon's head emerged from the small opening, a comrade mistook him for a Japanese fighter.

"He pulled the plunger," Dixon said. "I remember being hit from the bottom of my feet and flying in the air. I wasn't thinking about dying. I was thinking, 'I'm going to get the son of a gun.'"

He awoke in the hospital, still smoldering over the mistaken identity.

## AVIATION AT LAST



Wilbur A. Dixon  
"Wil"

After contracting hepatitis in the hospital, he was sent to work at bases throughout the U.S. before landing in Kansas with the 301st Heavy Bombing group, maintaining B-24s.

By 1947, the aviation program was reopened and Dixon was accepted.

### Courtesy Photo

*"The only place I could go when I graduated high school, to even get close, was Tuskegee. That was the naval academy for Colored."*

"The Air Force reopened the whole program," he said. "It was integrated. I trained at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio." He flew T-6s at first, then P-51s.

After graduation from flight school came in September 1949, he applied to different programs. He was assigned into air defense command, flying F-84 and F-86s on coastal air patrol along the cape near Massachusetts' Otis Air Force Base.

From there, it was on to Alaska.

"We flew F-94s during Korea," he said. "Instead of sending me to Korea, they sent me to Alaska. I flew reconnaissance missions and interceptions. We were there to keep the Russians from coming over," he said.

"As for the number of missions we flew, that I couldn't tell you," he said. "Usually you only count missions while in combat and 50 sent you home. In air defense, they didn't care how many. It was a job, but it was more than a job. To me, it was exciting."

As an example, he recalled a 1949 mid-air collision outside Las Vegas.

"We were practicing combat formations," he said. "One got too close." Dixon said the next few moments unfolded as if in slow motion. As portions of the plane began to peel away, Dixon calmly activated his parachute. "When I woke up, there was somebody flying over me," he said. "I was hanging upset down in the parachute, looking up. I wasn't thinking about dying. I wanted that stupid guy flying upside down to quit clowning around." He quickly realized the problem: he was slipping out of his chute. He struggled to return upright and watched as a distant mountain range drew closer. At touch down, he started bouncing.

Dixon was still in a daze when the base commander drove up in a Jeep to retrieve him. "Every bump we hit on the way back took my breath away," he said. "There was a trick going around where the big guys would take the little guys' chutes. The only thing that kept me from falling out of my chute was the canteen strapped to my side."

In spite of best efforts, Dixon said he never caught up with the supposed prankster who swapped out his chute.

## **LONG ROAD HOME**

He left the Air Force in 1955 to go back to school, but returned a couple of years later to work in the medical corps and teach.

His wife of 49 years, Pauline, was among his students who sat on the front row in a class at Lackland Air Force Base.

"We had our first date on July 4 and married on August the 20th," said Mrs. Dixon, who is White. "I never thought about our differences. It never occurred to me there was a difference." Dixon said others weren't so open-minded.

After realizing he could receive no additional promotions past his rank of staff sergeant, he sought a discharge and entered the Army as an enlisted man, remaining there until retirement.

"That's when it got interesting," he said. "I spent two tours in Vietnam, one as a medic in the third surgical hospital, which was a MASH hospital in Ben Hoa."

The second was with the 2/17 Cavalry with the 101st Airborne Division.

Even in camp, danger lurked around every corner.

"The Vietnamese, at night, would keep us awake by sending mortar rounds into the camp," he said. "There were also infiltrators. I guess I never thought anything would happen to me."

Even when things were quiet, Dixon said he was always looking over his shoulder, "We felt like there was more danger from the folks in our military who were drug addicts than the enemy. We had a lot of them."

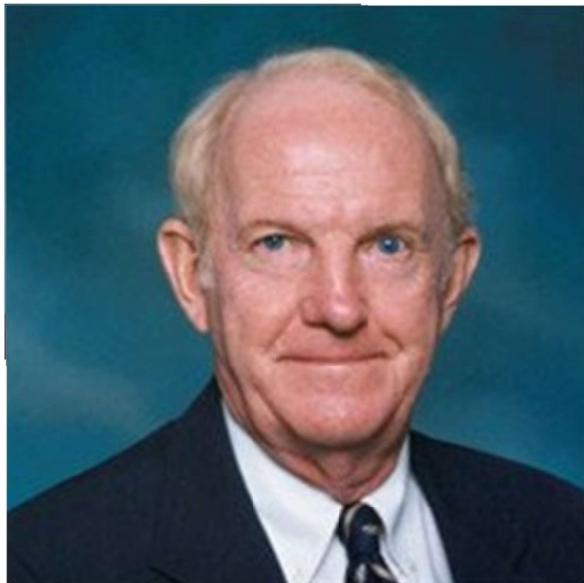
Those were difficult, stressful years, he said, but joy today is found in life's simple pleasures: reading, gardening and spending time with family.

Photos of the couple's seven children, 17 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren are proudly displayed throughout their tree-shrouded home of 13 years.

The Dixon's made Tyler their home until a few years ago when they moved the New Mexico for family reasons.

Wilbur Dixon will be missed by all.

# William Thorburn McKenzie



On August 27, 2019 William Thorburn McKenzie reached the finish line of a remarkable life well lived. We give honor and praise to God for the life of Bill, a man we adored as a brother, husband, father and grandfather. Bill's personal faith in Jesus Christ was the cornerstone of his life. We are confident we will see him again in heaven.

Bill was born in Kerrville, Texas to Alex and Margaret McKenzie on July 15, 1930. The family moved to Tyler in 1935 where Bill attended Gary Elementary, Hogg Jr. High, and Tyler High School, graduating in 1947. Bill began college at Spartan Aviation School in Tulsa and graduated from Oklahoma University with a BS in Mechanical Engineering in 1951. He met his wife Sharon in 1950 while working at Young Life's Star Ranch in Colorado. They were married in Tyler on October 6, 1956 and started a life together of 62 years. Bill and Sharon raised their three children in Dallas before returning to East Texas.

Through involvement with Young Life, the idea of camping as a ministry took root in Bill's heart and mind. He founded Pine Cove Christian Camp and Conference Center in Tyler in 1967 on property owned by his parents. God grew this seed into a multifaceted program including youth, family, and inner-city camping, encompassing 11 camps throughout Texas and South Carolina. Pine Cove was the love of Bill and Sharon's life, and watching the ministry draw many people to Christ as Savior gave them immeasurable joy and excitement.

From an early age, Bill was enthralled with airplanes. He built models, studied aviation, soloed a week after his 16th birthday and earned his pilot's license shortly thereafter at Tyler Pounds Field. He graduated from college on a Friday night and started his job at General Dynamics in Ft. Worth the following Monday as a propulsion engineer.

His love of airplanes continued for his entire life. Bill enjoyed a ministry called Angel Flight, using his airplane to transport cancer patients to their treatment centers. Bill was a member of the **Historic Aviation Memorial Museum** for a number of years and served on the board of directors for 6 years.

He will be missed.

# Robert Faulkner



Robert Frank Faulkner (Bob) went to be with his Lord and Savior on August 28, 2018, at the age of 96, passing away at his home in Tyler after losing a battle with Melanoma. Born in Duncan, Oklahoma on January 16, 1922, Bob and his family moved to Electra when he was ten years old, where he later graduated high school and met his future wife, Gloria Beth Weatherall. After a stint in the military and completion of his college degree, Bob and Beth moved to Tyler in 1948.

Bob was instrumental in many of the institutions enjoyed by so many Tyler families today. In coordination with the cities of Tyler and Lindale, he established a Faulkner Park in both locations on land he had owned, and was particularly proud of his Sprayground water park at the Tyler location.

Bob was a life-long tennis enthusiast, having lettered on the tennis team at the University of Oklahoma. He was a co-founder of the Tyler Tennis and Swim Club (now the Tyler Athletic and Swim Club), which became the center of tennis in East Texas, and he established the Faulkner Tennis Center at Faulkner Park. He was an enthusiastic supporter of tennis in Tyler, acting as a volunteer assistant coach at both high schools, sponsoring an awards dinner for John Tyler players, and "hosting" the United States Tennis Association Bob Faulkner Junior Major Zone tennis tournament, played in Tyler ever summer by the best juniors in the state of Texas. He was well known for giving out "Percy Awards" (actually eagle's wings) to deserving players, the award being named after Percy the Persevering Mouse.

Bob was also a life-long golfer. In addition to being a long-time member of Willowbrook Country Club, Bob was co-founder of both Briarwood Country Club (now known as Cascades) and Hollytree Country Club, and was club golf champion at Briarwood for three years.

Bob truly had a servant's heart. For almost 50 years, he dressed up and played Santa Claus at various children's homes throughout the Tyler area during the Christmas season, often

delivering toys that he had personally made in his woodworking shop. First his own kids, and then his grandchildren, and ultimately his great grandchildren frequently accompanied Bob on his Christmas rounds dressing up as his elves.

Bob helped found the **Historical Aviation Memorial Museum** at Tyler Pounds Regional Airport. He purchased the computer and all the components for and built a flight simulator, where he often served as a volunteer teaching kids how to fly a plane on the flight simulator.

During World War II Bob served in the United States Army Air Corps and was stationed in the South Pacific. His service included stationing at Guam and Japan and included an assignment inspecting a Kamikaze Aircraft factory bombed out by the Allies. After his honorable discharge he returned to the University of Oklahoma where he received a degree in Mechanical Engineering. After moving to Tyler he became the first air conditioning engineer in East Texas. In 1975 he received a United States patent for a solar panel he designed.

Bob was a member of Marvin United Methodist Church for 70 years where he served on the Board of Stewards, as Chairman of the Property Committee and as Sunday school teacher as well as serving as Scoutmaster of the Marvin United Methodist Church Troop 336. An Eagle Scout himself, Bob participated in the first ever scouting Jamboree in America held in Washington, D.C. in 1937. In 1962 he was awarded the Silver Beaver Award for outstanding contributions to scouting.

He will be missed.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

General Membership Meeting	January 25, 2020
Commemorative Air Force Visit	April 3,4,5, 2020
Challenge Air for Kids and Friends	May 2, 2020
Magnificent Seven, Vintage Warbird Expo	July 2-5, 2020